

Reverse osmosis facility opens at WAPA's Richmond plant

By **FIONA STOKES**
Daily News Staff

ST. CROIX — The V.I. Water and Power Authority and Seven Seas Water Corporation conducted a joint opening of the St. Croix Seawater Reverse Osmosis Facility on Wednesday, bringing the territory's water production capabilities to 7 million gallons a day.

Don Prowant, Seven Seas site project manager, said WAPA knew at the turn of the century that the need would arise for more water production for the territory, and the plans started to take shape and between 2008 and 2009 when WAPA began a relationship with Seven Seas.

WAPA spokeswoman Jerain Fleming said the utility has been producing potable water across the territory by thermal desalination for more than 30 years. This process is dependent on steam production created by burning fuel oil in power plant boilers.

While the multi-effect distillation technology was viable in the past given the low cost of fuel, the volatile tendencies of the fuel oil market during the last several decades has made water production costly for WAPA, according to Fleming.

"After extensive research of options that would result in the lowest production cost for potable water, while maintaining high water quality, seawater reverse osmosis was chosen as the technology that would best meet the needs of the authority and its customers," she said in a prepared statement. "The reverse osmosis process pushes sea water through a very fine membrane at high pressure, separating the water molecules from the salt ions, creating purified drinking water."

In April 2012, WAPA signed a 20-year build-own-operate agreement with Seven Seas to construct a Salt Water Reverse Osmosis system to meet St. Croix customer demand for approximately 2.5 to 3 million gallons daily. The reverse osmosis system at the Richmond Plant is capable of producing a guaranteed supply of up to 3.7 million gallons per day of water for potable use, with the capability of expanding to 4.8 million gallons per day in the future if the need arises, according to WAPA Board Chairman Gerald Groner.

The temporary reverse osmosis plants began functioning in 2009 when several units were installed in St. Croix's Richmond Plant on a short-term basis to address poten-



Daily News Photo by FIONA STOKES
Tom Williams, senior project manager, leads a tour of the salt water reverse osmosis plant Wednesday on St. Croix.

tial water shortages on the island. In 2012, after a permanent contract was negotiated with Seven Seas, several more temporary units were installed in the Randolph Harley power plant when malfunctioning generators limited the WAPA's ability to produce drinking water for St. Thomas and St. John customers. The permanent St. Thomas facilities then were constructed by Seven Seas and dedicated in August.

WAPA Executive Director Hugo Hodge Jr. said the change from thermal desalination to the reverse osmosis production technology should result in a 50 percent reduction in the cost of water production, which is savings that will be passed on to the customers.

Hodge asked legislators to create legislation and funding to revamp the aged underground infrastructure. He said the iron pipes are rusted out and building up inside, which sometimes affects the color of the water.

Hodge said the water produced

is good, but the pipes are creating a problem. He estimated \$300 million is needed to replace the infrastructure territorywide.

"Anything built to last 20 or 30 years and lasts for 60, you've gotten your money's worth," he said. "It is time to start looking at replacing and that is the type of legislative help we need, not with efficiency."

Mario Mondo, Caribbean president for Seven Seas Water Corp., said Seven Seas is looking toward the future, ensuring that they create a skilled pool of workers to continue the operation of the plant. He said Seven Seas has offered two scholarships in process technology, four internship positions and hired two graduates of the newly developed process technology program at the University of the Virgin Islands.

Those in attendance Wednesday toured the new facility.

— Contact reporter Fiona Stokes at 714-9149 or email fstokes@dailynews.vi.

Cruise Ships

Today, Nov. 21

Norwegian Gem (2,340)	8 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Havensight
Eurodam (2,044)	8 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Crown Bay

Friday, Nov. 22

Summit (2,158)	8 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Havensight
Seven Seas Navigator (490)	8 a.m. to 6 p.m.	Havensight
Ryndam (1,258)	8 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Crown Bay
Emerald Princess (3,080)	8 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Crown Bay

Saturday, Nov. 23

Seabourn Sojourn (450)	7 a.m. to 6 p.m.	Cruz Bay
Adventure of the Seas (3,840)	8 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Frederiksted

Sunday, Nov. 24

Jewel of the Seas (2,500)	8 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Havensight
Summit (1,950)	8 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Frederiksted

Monday, Nov. 25

Carnival Valor (2,500)	7 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Havensight
Adventure of the Seas (3,840)	8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.	Havensight
Jewel of the Seas (2,500)	8 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Frederiksted

Numbers in parentheses indicate passenger capacity.



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